

Integrating a Theistic Worldview into the Classroom

Scripture and Perspective

It goes without saying that a Christian educator does not think of mathematics, history, or grammar, among other things, as if they were not from God; or that these disciplines cannot be brought under the dominion of Jesus, the alpha and the omega, in whom and from whom are all things.

When the teachings of the Bible have been fully appreciated it will be observed that its pages are devoted to the doctrine of salvation in which all the persons of the Godhead participate. If as James Kalis says, **“Christian education is not the accumulation of facts, but the molding of an outlook so that all things are looked at from a given center,”** then standing at that center is Jesus Christ. All things must be looked at from the standpoint of the mission of Jesus. This does not mean of course that all human learning bears directly on that mission; but it does mean that salvation brings all things under its purview. How is this possible? It is possible because salvation encompasses all of life. There is no part of life that salvation does not touch upon or affect. All things are from and of God. This idea is seminal.

Scripture says, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein.” [Psalm 24:1] The psalmist distances himself from the Anabaptist community of the 16th century whose legacy remains pervasive. Anabaptists believed in God, but as Albrecht Ritschl [1822-89] says, they refused to believe in the world. Yes, the earth was the Lord’s, but the earth stood in the way of faith because mystics cannot always appreciate the way physical things have been used by God to convey or heighten spirituality. Well-rounded Christians believe that the material things of space and time not only do not militate against faith, they may also be used to teach us about the glory and power of the Creator. The creation is a catalyst for Christian learning. This is one of the reasons why the earth with whatever secrets it yields to the inquiring mind was by the Creator’s own estimate, not only “good” but “very good” [Gen. 1:31].

It is our tendency to think as if God is “up there” and that what we are learning and doing is “down here.” Since this kind of thinking has both theological and ethical implications it must be acknowledged and confronted. Deism, which tells us that God left the creation in the hands of natural laws and principles and then went off somewhere, is alive and well. Deism was driven from the churches of America by 1820, but almost immediately it found a following in those outside the church, many of whom were in positions of leadership. This explains in part why so many of our contemporaries say that they believe in God, but then go on to live their lives as if God and the universe were the same. Presently the current majority has not read Friedrich Nietzsche [1844-1900] who took it upon himself to inform Europe and the world about the death of God; nevertheless they have received his message through the popular culture.

Those who wish to integrate a theistic worldview in a classroom setting must learn how to steel their minds against the popular culture with which they have familiarized themselves. This will set an example for students who may not think as Christians. Needless to say, if it is the habit of a teacher to think as a Christian this will manifest itself in class. A reflex action should take over whenever a teacher opens a book or begins a class lecture. Just as the eye closes when a foreign object approaches it, so a teacher will close his or her mind to any idea that is not in accord with Christian doctrine. Educators who are truly informed will be able to state why they will not give credence to ideas that conflict with a Christian worldview.

In the contest between secularists and Christians there is much that we have in common. Like them we think that if the moon were not aligned as it is with the Earth, it would wobble on its axis. Disagreement comes into the picture when Christians are asked to explain why these things are so, or what this has to do with the final day of reckoning which we believe is relevant, because it directly influences the future of our planet. Christians believe that all things rest upon two pillars: God made the world for a purpose, and through providence He will see to it that His purpose is fulfilled. That being the case, we should ask our students to adopt a Puritan way of thinking which affirms the idea that “We cannot be robbed of God’s providence,” anymore than God could abandon His purpose for the world. All things hang together. Christians must not only acknowledge that the beginning had its genesis in God; they also understand that we all are facing a great eschaton. We may with joyful confidence tell students that God sits upon the circle of the earth, and that believers will witness the day when we beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks. [Isaiah 2:4]

The students that sit in our classrooms encounter the same challenges faced by teachers. Will we hold on to faith and the perspective it grants us; will we continue to think as Christians who humbly serve others; or will we look at things from the viewpoint of those who believe that the teachings of Christ have nothing to do with the present or the future? When we educate students we must remember that they breathe in the existing culture in the same way that those who live by factories are forced to breathe in airborne pollutants. Since there is something sinful in all of us that can answer to our culture, we must at all times watch, pray, and never give up the high ground. High above the ether level, we can look down on secularists who if they pray at all must do so to a God who has removed Himself from the world.

The students placed in our care must be reminded of the many benefits that come to those who look at the world from the standpoint of Christ. There is nothing wrong in pointing out that the world is hapless and hopeless. Teachers should be able to show students where unbelief and contradictory thinking leads them. To assist in this we should be asking questions. How does this or that relate to Jesus and the revealed word of God? Can you believe what you have affirmed and also believe in the Bible and its approach to reality? **Does one idea have the power of canceling out another idea, and is there no law of contradiction?** You believe this or that and yet you say you believe in Jesus, how is this so? Do you not know that in the same way that two things cannot occupy the same space, two things cannot be both true and false at the same time?

The Imperative of Faith in the Classroom

The apostle Paul goes to the heart of the matter in 2 Thessalonians 3:2 where he says that “All men have not faith.” This short sentence was used by Paul to explain why Christians were being persecuted by otherwise reasonable men. Since faith encompasses all of life’s aspects, it changes our perspective. Faith opens the door to a theistic worldview through which God is central to everything. That being the case the goal of integrating a theistic worldview in the teaching process must aim at enhancing the life of faith.

We take our first step toward God when we conclude that a being far greater than ourselves is responsible for the creation. In its own limited way the creation reveals God. [Ps. 19:1-6] Those who study the physical sciences study the works of God. Indeed they study God. We take our second step toward God when we admit that the creation does not tell us all that we need to know about God and what He might expect of us. To learn about God we must be given a more definitive revelation. That is what we find in the Bible. In its pages we not only learn that we should please God; we also learn that the best of us are unworthy of God. Immediately we are confronted with the doctrine of divine forgiveness and grace. [Gen. 3:15, 6:8] Biblical faith goes beyond acknowledging that God made the world. It calls for a

redeemer. In his brilliant apology to the Roman leaders, Tertullian [~ 155-230 A.D.] says, “But, that we might attain an ampler and more authoritative knowledge at once of Himself, and His counsels and will, God has added a written revelation for the behoof of everyone whose heart is seeking Him, that seeking he may find, and finding believe, and believing obey.” [1:XV111]

In keeping with Tertullian, John Calvin [1509-64] says that the creation is insufficient in and of itself to lead us to a true knowledge of God, and that it must be accompanied by a more explicit revelation, one that calls attention to the work of Christ. He wrote,

“Accordingly the same prophet, after he states ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament shows forth the work of His hands, the ordered succession of days and nights proclaim his majesty’ [Ps.19:1-2] then proceeds to mention His word: ‘The law of the Lord is spotless, converting souls; the testimony of the Lord is faithful, giving wisdom to little ones; the righteous acts of the Lord are right;, rejoicing hearts; the precept of the Lord is clear, enlightening eyes.’ [19:7-8]” [Institutes, Book 1, Chapter 6:4]

Elsewhere in the same work Calvin explains why in particular the word of God is needed. He tells us without it we will not know that we must be reconciled to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. His words are not a model of political correctness chiefly because he limits salvation to those who have discovered for themselves that the way to God is through Christ. As Calvin says,

“In this ruin of mankind no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of salvation, or favorable in any way, until Christ the Mediator comes forward to reconcile Him to us. Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel that God as our maker supports us by His power, governs us by His providence, nourishes us by His goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings - and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ. First, as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows Himself to be simply the Creator. Then in the face of Christ [2 Corinthians 4:6] He shows Himself the Redeemer.” [Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 2:1]

Since faith is created in only one way, through the hearing and reading of God’s word, then the Bible must be given its rightful place at the head of the class. Scripture says, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” [Romans 10:17] Does this mean that all that pertains to Christianity will have to be proven? It does not because what is sufficient for faith, namely the death and resurrection of Jesus as predicted by the prophets and confirmed by the apostles, has been verified. [1 Cor. 15:1ff] Here is where the educator must guide students. Christianity must not be presented as though it were a kind of existentialism which does not rely on proofs in the empirical realm. On the other hand it must not be presented as if faith were nothing other than an exercise in rational thinking.

Teachers must seek to fortify their students against those forces and persons that would hinder their faith. The faith of some early Christians became unsettled because of Hymenaeus and Philetus [2 Timothy 2:17]. We must remember that faith is like a fire. Sometimes it burns brightly; at other times it hardly glows. **The goal is always the same. To build up those who listen to us in their most holy faith.** A wise teacher will recognize that some doubt because they do not believe, while others doubt because they believe.

Revelation: The Foundation on Which We Build

The Bible has its own way of looking at the world and reality. A rivalry does in fact exist between the way of man and the way of God. If we base our Christianity on the Bible we will know the truth. The church which preaches the truth is “pillar and ground of the truth.” [1 Tim. 3:15]

It might seem like an oversimplification to say that there are only two ways to look at reality, a wrong way and a right way, but that is what Christians believe. And that is what must be affirmed by all who teach from a Christian perspective. The wrong way is the product of human wisdom. The right way is the way of the Old Testament Scriptures as interpreted by New Testament apostles. We see through a lens that has been ground for us in the workshop of those same apostles whose writings are of equal inspiration to those of the older testament. The Old Testament predicts; the New Testament fulfills. The revelation that Christians believe in has been corroborated. This harmonizing of Old and New Testament inspiration is spelled out for us in 2 Tim. 3:14-17 where Timothy is confirmed in his New Testament faith by appeals made to the Old Testament.

We are prone to rely on intuition or an unaided reason so that we may learn of God. On the contrary revelation is necessary because God is hid from our eyes due to the blindness of our hearts. [Ephesians 4:18] Our blindness is such that Jesus must enlighten us not only through the Bible, but by a direct act which helps us discern spiritual things. This explains why true believers are recipients of the gift of the Holy Spirit. [1 Cor. 12:13] What took place on the road to Emmaus as recorded by Luke is instructive. “Then opened He their hearts that they might know the Scriptures.” [Luke 24:45, see also Ps. 51:6] Not only is the gospel inconceivable [1 Cor. 2:9] if left to ourselves we will fashion a “gospel” that is to our own liking. Athanasius [~ 293-373 A.D.] said that false teachers are willing to preserve the words of Scripture, but not the meaning. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A word of caution is necessary at this juncture. The gift of the Holy Ghost does not mean that we can determine the meaning of Bible passages because we have a phone line to heaven. Scriptures says, “Study to show yourself approved unto God . . .” [2 Tim. 2:15a]

The true gospel must fit hand-in-glove with the true God. But how can we know God? We know God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture says, “No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” [John 1:18] The heretic Arius [~250-336 A.D.] in dependence on Origen [~185-254 A.D.] said that the Son could not see the Father. Separated by almost a century they somehow managed to overlook the passage just cited. Jesus not only preached grace and forgiveness, but also showed the way in which the message of salvation complements the true nature of God. The apostle Paul reinforces this conception in Romans 3:21-26 (KJV),

²¹But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²²Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶**To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just,** and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. [See also Ps. 51:4]

According to Scripture no one has direct access to God. If we are ever to come to God, if we are to learn of Him, we must of necessity come by way of revealed truth. Jesus says that true worshippers worship God “in truth.” [John 4:24] Paul writes of this, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those that believe.” [1 Cor. 1:21 NASB, Hebrews 11:1-6] This is where we begin and this is where we end.

Personal Philosophy of Teaching

My teaching philosophy is the result of the books I have read, the persons and teachers with whom I have come in contact, and the unshakeable conviction that the Bible is the revealed Word of God. With regard to the latter I am certain that the Bible communicates its own view as to the way in which educators should develop a teaching philosophy that is distinctly Christian. Augustine [354-430 A.D.] tells us that the sole foundation of a Christian education is to first understand the sacred Scriptures, and then to develop ways to express their meaning. In the *Happy Life* he says that the Christian educator is “the bearer of the word of God, the minister of saving truths.” This approach to learning repudiates an education that is in essence secular. **If we are to attain to a complete formation of a Christian mind we must accept the idea that a religious purpose has been assigned to the intellectual life.** This indicates that standing in opposition to the Christian’s view of the intellectual life is any number of unacceptable approaches to education. These have one common fault; they do not submit to the authority of the word of God.

The Bible speaks about itself. When doing so it lays claim to unicity. The Scriptures present us with the idea that what is taught therein could never have been discovered. That being the case the first task of a Christian educator is to determine whether the Bible contains any internal evidence to support the claim that its message is unique. Of course I do not mean to suggest that the Bible is true just because it is unique. Instead I mean to say that the Bible is unique because it is true. “Christianity is the one true religion because it is the one revealed religion.” [B. B. Warfield 1851-1921] Discovering for ourselves whether the Bible is the word of God is our rite of passage.

Jesus said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” [Matthew 3:25a] Interestingly those who think that religion can have little or nothing to say when they study the sciences or humanities may not always be aware of it, but their house is collapsing around them. It goes without saying that Christians do not live in two different worlds, one that is intellectual, and another that is spiritual. This is why the house of the thinking Christian stands erect through all the ages. Ironically so-called modern man has done nothing other than add a footnote to what has already been weighed in the balances and found wanting in what maybe called the Greek experiment. Athanasius said, “These philosophers could not influence their own neighborhood, but this one man Jesus filled the world with men that loved righteousness and no longer feared death.” The teacher who espouses a comprehensive view of Christianity has in his or her possession the brick and mortar of a sturdy edifice. Time has vindicated the Christian experiment.

The supreme challenge of the Christian life is to think as a Christian. Thinking in that particular way is a difficult thing to master because Christians are required to go beyond a change of outlook. Theory must give way to practice, and thinking should be followed by doing. The apostle Paul says, “Let this mind, or this way of thinking, be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . .” Paul is talking about a frame of mind or what may be called an attitude. This is why he hastens to add these compelling words, “who made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” [Philippians 2:5-8] This kind of mindset through which Jesus proved that He was a humble servant should be in us just as it was in Him. Admittedly this way of thinking will not be achieved if at first we do not learn to think from a Christian perspective, but it will also remain elusive if we do not spend time thinking about the way Jesus served others. Those who teach will need to show students why and in what ways all things do in fact relate to our high calling, which is that we should be conformed to the image of Christ. This means we must encourage our students to become servants. [Matt. 6:32]

The Natural Man

Now while it is true that the law of the syllogism is the same for all men; it is certainly not true that sinners and saints read the Bible in the same way. This fact, at once pertinent and well documented, indicates that something may come between ourselves and the thing under consideration. That being the case, the teaching philosophy that is presented to us in the Bible will take into account human sin. Our first parents left in their wake any number of proofs that indicate that on coming into the world we brought with us a fallen nature, one that views the gospel of God in a pejorative light. "In sin did my mother conceive me" [Ps. 51:5] means that sin was conceived in us. Standing behind the will and casting its mantle over reason is a real and unacknowledged prejudice which explains why all who hear the gospel do not readily believe nor fully appreciate its precepts. **Consequently a teaching philosophy that is sound will come to grips with the words of Scripture in which the apostle Paul says, ". . . the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God...neither can he know them . . ."** [1 Cor. 2:14]

There is a line in the sand. On one side there are those who lovingly embrace what has been taught in the Bible. Across from them are those who recoil on hearing that they should receive "the things of the Spirit of God." They cannot *know* them in the way Jacob knew Rachel whom he loved. In their natural state they have not experienced the influence of the Holy Spirit whom the fathers called "the Lord and giver of life." This means that the Christian educator seeks to do more than inform the mind. The long-range goal of Christian education is the kindling of the religious affections, so that those who are taught will do more than acknowledge that Christianity is the truth. The committed Christian educator seeks to not only convince, but convert. He or she distinguishes between assent and faith. Winning arguments is one thing; winning people is quite another. We are dealing not only with the mind but with the whole person, or what the Scriptures call the heart. [Jeremiah 17:9-10, Rom. 8:5-8].

The things of the Spirit of God about which Paul writes, which he says cannot be known by the natural man, are not hidden from view. It is because sinners understand what the Bible is saying that they are moved to find reasons why they should not come to know or embrace the things of the Spirit. This opens a door for the Christian educator. Every time a person rejects the truth, the mind has to furnish a "because." This fact grants the Christian teacher an opportunity to present Christianity as the most believable of all religions. Of course I do not suggest that a person truly believes in Jesus just because reason has been satisfied. Believing is after all a moral act. [John 2:23-25] On the one hand we must not think that Christianity calls for a faith that is irrational [Soren Kierkegaard 1813-1855], nor should we think that we have believed just because we are convinced that Christianity satisfies reason [Alexander Campbell 1788-1866]. Christians believe because they see in Jesus the solution to their sin problem which they know must have consequences. They also know to the satisfaction of reason that they have not been deceived by "cunningly devised fables." On the one hand believing is a moral act; on the other hand, eyewitness accounts authenticate the truth of the gospel, so that believing is for that very reason not at all unreasonable.

The Imago Dei

Man is made in the image of God. This means that we can look at the world around us and our place in that world. Going beyond that, we can even scrutinize how or what it was that made us think about the world in a certain way. This is so grand a concept that our ability to think about thought moved Aristotle [384-322 B.C.] to suggest that man might after all have a soul. Included in the idea that we have been made in the image of God is the ability to determine whether we have arrived at our conclusions in an

unbiased manner. We are so “fearfully and wonderfully made” that we can pass judgment on the way we pass judgment. Immanuel Kant’s book *The Critique of Pure Reason* [1787] is nothing more than an attempt to do that very thing. Kant took the brain out and looked at the way in which it forms its opinions. Unfortunately while doing this he did not properly evaluate his own prejudices. In his case it led him to deny the doctrine of revelation.

Most important of all is the God factor. Not only can we look at our place in reality, or how we came to certain conclusions, we can try and determine if God looks at everything in the same way. We can look at God, looking at us, looking at Him. This explains why mankind has always sought and expected a revelation from God. This need to discover the voice of God, or what we call revelation, explains why philosophers past and present swim upstream when they choose reason over revelation. Having decided that reason is the sieve through which all things must pass, since that very idea seems reasonable, they are unwilling to accept anything that contradicts what they believe is in keeping with reason. It has been suggested that the philosophers sought God in the truth, and that this in particular made them different from the Old Testament prophets who sought the truth in God. Philosophers erred because they decided on the nature of truth without first consulting God. If we begin with God, we will know truth.